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ABSTRACT

A nationwide sample of disabled college student service providers was surveyed concerning the services they offer, and the results are represented for large and small institutions in the sample. The needs of disabled students on college campuses have become a national concern over the past 10 years as more disabled persons are exercising their rights to a higher education. As they enter colleges and universities, campus service providers must deal with the question of how best to deliver the services that are most needed. There is a great diversity in the disabilities, so there is a need for specialized services. Studies show that able-bodied students tend to have negative attitudes toward these students on campus, and faculty members with previous experience with disabled students were most receptive to them. It is suggested that one form of support service would be training and educating faculty and staff. In order to collect data on programs and services available, one university disabled student services office established a national data bank for disabled student service providers. The methodology of this survey, which was sponsored by the Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education, the results noted. Institutional characteristics and disabled student services unit characteristics are discussed. Data on the disabled student population and services available are included. Findings show that despite funding dilemmas, a wide variety of services were offered to disabled students in large and small institutions nationwide. This gathering of data may help disabled students in providing an impetus for the development of programs to address yet unmet needs. Contains 8 references. Tables are included. (SM)

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A National Survey of Services Provided for Disabled Students in Higher Education

Marie T. Sergent, William E. Sedlacek, Robert T. Carter, and William R. Scales

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# A National Survey of Services Provided for Disabled Students in Higher Education

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A nationwide sample of disabled student service providers was surveyed concerning the services they provided. The results of the study are represented for large and small institutions in the sample. The results of the study indicate that while the number of students registered with disabled student services providers have reportedly increased in the past five years, large institutions have not received a parallel increase in funding to provide services to these students. Additionally, the number of learning disabled students on campuses nationwide has increased, but no increment in funding has accompanied this increase. While both large and small institutions offered a wide range of services to disabled students, specialized courses were less commonly offered.

Implications of these findings for faculty and staff of higher education institutions are discussed.

The needs of disabled students on college campuses have become a national concern in the last decade. It is estimated that approximately 35 million United States residents have various physical, mental, and emotional disabilities (McBee, 1982). Prior to the passage of federal legislation, (e.g., the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), the disabled population in the United States seldom had their rights to educational access acknowledged. Recently, however, more disabled persons are exercising their rights to receiving higher education. As more students with disabilities enter colleges and universities, campus service providers are confronted with questions about how to deliver services that are most needed by this group of students.

Disabled students on campus represent a diverse group, with disabilities ranging from physical handicaps to learning disabilities, which indicates the necessity for specialized services (Patterson, Sedlacek, & Scales, in press). The diversity among disabled students suggests that organizational units responsible for disabled student services should be diverse and multifaceted. For example, McBee (1982) has observed that in addition to the structural and architectural changes that have been mandated to accomodate access for disabled students, colleges and universities should also provide: a) pre-admission counseling and orientation; b) training for faculty and staff to aid their work with students with various disabilities; c) academic support services to students; and d) career placement

assistance upon graduation. These suggested services can be coordinated by the disabled student office on each college and university campus, but auxillary services can appropriately be offered by other campus units, as well. Current research findings suggest that while higher education institutions have made considerable progress in removing physical barriers for disabled students, fewer changes have occurred in the area of support services.

In a survey of 155 colleges, Marion and Iovacchini (1983) found that college administrators were making a concerted effort to respond to the regulations of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Other studies (Warnath & Dunnington, 1981) have suggested that while some physical changes have been made to assist disabled persons on campus, additional changes are necessary. Architectural alteration constitutes only one step toward institutional accessibility, and additional changes in the area of support services are also necessary. For example, Marion and Iovacchini (1983) suggested that it would be helpful for student personnel workers to receive training so that they are better able to understand the needs of disabled students, and so that attitudinal barriers might also be removed.

Several studies have examined the attitudes of faculty, staff, and other students toward disabled students on campus. Stovall and Sedlacek (1983) found that able-bodied students held negative attitudes toward disabled students on campus, and that these attitudes varied both by type of disability and the situation in which disabled students were encountered. Students

were more comfortable in personal situations with blind students than with students in wheelchairs, while they were more comfortable in academic situations with students in wheelchairs than with blind students. A variable not included in this study was the degree of experience that students had had with disabled people. However, Fonosch and Schwab (1981) studied faculty attitudes toward disabled students, and found that faculty members with prior experience with disabled students were most receptive to these students. This finding provides support for the suggestion that additional support services in the form of training and education of faculty and staff would have benefits for the comfort and accessibility of the higher education environment for disabled students by reducing attitudinal barriers (Marion & Iovacchini, 1983).

These studies suggest the importance of examining program, staff, and student characteristics of colleges and universities which provide services to disabled students in order to understand national trends and developments. Although studies have reported administrative support for the admission of disabled students to higher education institutions, (c.f., Newman, 1976), the types of services that have been available to these students once they are admitted are not clear and have not been described in a systematic manner.

In an effort to collect data concerning the programs and services that are offered to disabled students on campuses nationally, a disabled student services (DSS) office at a large eastern university established a national data bank for disabled student service providers. The data bank was sponsored by the

Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education (AHSSPE) and had the goal of providing higher education institutions with information gathered from a nationally based sample of peer institutions. The results of the data bank survey from the 1986-1987 academic year and the implications of these findings for service providers will be discussed.

## Method

### Procedure

The survey was mailed to a national sample of higher education institutions with an invitation to participate in the DSS Data Bank. Sixty three institutions responded and comprise the sample for the study. Participation involved completing and returning the survey instrument and paying a nominal data bank membership fee. All participants received a summary of the findings. The instrument contained questions about topics including amount and sources of funding, types and ranges of services offered, and information concerning the nature of the disabled student population on campus.

## Results

### Institutional Characteristics

For the purposes of summarizing the data, institutions were categorized as either large (total student body numbering 10,000 or more) or small (total student body numbering fewer than 10,000). Five institutional categories were represented in the data bank. Of these, four year public universities comprised 75% of the "large institution" category, while four year public and

private colleges, four year private universities, and two year private colleges represented the largest portion of the "small institution" category. For the remainder of this paper, data will be presented in terms of this institutional size category.

The mean enrollment for all schools was 14,200 students. The mean for small institutions was 4900, while the mean for large institutions was 22,700. There were 32 large institutions and 31 small institutions in the sample. Fifty three percent of all institutions were four year public universities, 7% were four year public colleges, 18% were four year private universities, 3% were four year private colleges, and 19% were two year public colleges.

Disabled Student Services Unit Characteristics

The mean annual budget for DSS Units was $115,000; $135,000 for large schools and $98,000 for small schools. For 56% of small schools, all of this budgeted amount came from institutional funds, while 60% of large institutions received all of their budget from institutional funds. The remaining funding for disabled student services in both large and small schools came from a variety of sources, including federal funds, individual or corporate donations, or private foundations.

Large institutions reported that, on the average, there had been an increase in the number of disabled students registered with their services. However, their budgets had remained static, and there was a reported trend toward greater demands for accountability in budget expenditures. Small institutions also reported that a larger number of students were registered with

their services, but these institutions reported a concurrent increase in budget and no change in the degree of budget accountability required.

Both large and small institutions reported an increase in the removal of architectural barriers to disabled students and in the referral of disabled students to their units from faculty and other campus agencies. Both large and small institutions reported that the number of adaptive devices for disabled students, such as braillers, personal computers, and tape recorders, had remained the same.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Disabled Student Population

Table 1 illustrates the numbers of students with particular disabilities that utilized services offered by their DSS units on campus. It appeared that while the largest number of disabled students utilizing services were mobility impaired, institutions reported that for the last five years, learning disabled students had increased in number and were quickly becoming the second largest group to utilize disabled student services in both large and small institutions.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Services Offered to Disabled Students

Table 2 summarizes the services that were offered by DSS units in the sample. It can be noted that both the range of

services and the number of institutions providing these services were similar for large and small institutions. Consultation with faculty members, reader and note-taking services, test administration assistance, and assistance in ordering special materials were the most commonly offered services for the insititutions sampled. Less commonly offered were transportation services, personal care attendants, and equipment repair services.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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Services for learning disabled students also covered a wide range, with assistance in ordering taped texts, test and quiz administration, and counseling being the most commonly offered services by both large and small institutions. Table 3 summarizes these services.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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In contrast to the large number of services offered to disabled students discussed above, there were fewer specialized courses available to disabled students on college and university campuses. Table 4 summarizes the percentages of large and small institutions who offered a variety of courses for credit that were specialized for disabled students. Large institutions were more likely to offer adaptive physical education courses for disabled students (45%) than were small institutions (9%), while

small institutions were more likely to have an orientation course for disabled students (13%) than were large institutions (6%).

## Discussion

The information cited above represents a picture of a number of disabled student services units nationwide. It provides an opportunity for service providers to gain insight from peer institutions, and provides information that might be especially useful in program planning and evaluation.

A number of the findings from this study are notable. For example, it is interesting to see that while the numbers of students registered with DSS offices have reportedly increased in the past five years, large institutions have reported that they have not received a parallel increase in funding to provide services to these students. Similarly, while the number of learning disabled students has increased on campuses nationwide, no additional funding has been provided for services for these students. It appears that either support service providers must find ways to stretch the available resources to meet the needs of the growing number of disabled students on campus, or additional funding must be made available to service providers in order to deliver appropriate services to this student group. The data bank provides a good source of information for service providers that are seeking to increase funding for disabled student programs.

Despite the funding dilemma reported by large institutions, a wide range and variety of services were offered to disabled students in both large and small institutions nationwide. In utilizing McBee's (1982) priorities for evaluating the

availability of services for disabled students on campus, it appears that academic support services were made amply available to students. Further, McBee's priority of training faculty and staff so that they might be better equipped to work with disabled students might be met in part with consultation to faculty and staff by disabled student services professionals. Nearly 100% of the institutions in the sample report providing consultation to campus faculty and staff.

However, McBee's second two recommendations, that colleges and universities provide pre-admission counseling and orientation and career placement assistance, appear to be less commonly provided by the institutions sampled. Although pre-admission assistance may be encompassed by the dimension called "counseling" in the current survey, other services traditionally offered in this category, such as course selection assistance, do not seem to be provided by a large number of institutions. These services might be best provided through specialized courses offered through DSS units or some other campus agency. Specialized courses were not typically offered by the schools studied, but it is not clear whether other campus agencies offered these services. This provides an important area for future research.

What significance do these findings have for student personnel staff in colleges and universities? At first glance, it might appear that these results are relevant only to service providers in disabled student service units. There are clear applications for these individuals, but administrators and

service providers in diverse campus roles might also benefit from this information.

At the very least, information about disabled students might increase the awareness of the needs of disabled students and the ways in which campuses meet, or fail to meet, these needs. While Fonosch and Schwab (1981) found that direct experience with disabled students helped to mediate negative attitudes toward them, information about the ways in which disabled students cope with their environments might also be helpful. It may be that an increased understanding of a group of individuals is the first step toward alleviating negative attitudes toward them. Sedlacek, Troy, and Chapman (1976) illustrated a reduction in negative racial attitudes as a result of a workshop that utilized extensive use of factual information. Increasing faculty and staff members' understanding about disabled students would have benefits for disabled students through allowing for appropriate problem solving or referral. The finding that disabled students seek help for academic problems from departmental advisors, academic advisors and faculty members, as well as from disabled student services offices (Patterson, Sedlacek, & Scales, in press), underscores the need for faculty and staff to have an understanding of the needs of disabled students on campus.

Finally, gaining information about the services and programs that are offered to disabled students on college and university campuses may provide an impetus for the development of programs to address the yet unmet needs of disabled students. Efforts to make campuses accessible for disabled students is a responsibility that can be shared by student personnel workers,

faculty, and staff alike. For example, orientation, career planning, and job placement services which are not currently available for disabled students might be offered through the campus career development office. There are a number of programs that might be best addressed in this way.

Data such as those reported here are useful in assessing the types of services that are currently available to disabled students, and in identifying those services that seem to be most needed. This information is important for many types of service providers on campus, for reasons such as referral, positive attitude development, and program development. Research concerning the types of services available and the perceptions of disabled students of these services would further contribute to making college and university campuses increasingly accessible to disabled students.

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Table 1

Types of Disability and Numbers of Students Served

| | Small Institutions | | Large Institutions | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| Deaf/Hearing impaired | 15 | 14 | 29 | 10 |
| Blind/Visually impaired | 11 | 10 | 21 | 7 |
| Orthopedic/Mobility impaired | 23 | 21 | 85 | 30 |
| Learning disabled | 37 | 35 | 57 | 20 |
| Head injured | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 |
| Other | 18 | 17 | 91 | 32 |
| | 107 | 100% | 288 | 100% |

Table 2

Percent of Institutions Offering Services to Disabled Students

| Type of Service | Small Institutions % | Large Institutions % |
|---|---|---|
| Priority registration | 72 | 84 |
| Consultation to faculty | 97 | 100 |
| Reader service | 84 | 90 |
| Test/Quiz administration | 97 | 94 |
| Note-taking service | 84 | 87 |
| Assistance in ordering taped texts | 91 | 97 |
| Interpreters for hearing impaired | 75 | 81 |
| Equipment repair service | 25 | 35 |
| Personal care attendants | 22 | 29 |
| Adapted transportation service | 38 | 45 |
| Tutoring service | 86 | 74 |
| Other services | 34 | 29 |

*All tabled figures are percentages of the number of institutions in that category offering each service.

Table 3

Percent of Institutions Offering Services to Learning Disabled Studen

| Type of Service | Small Institutions % | Large Institutions % |
|---|---|---|
| Diagnostic testing | 53 | 55 |
| Remedial services | 53 | 48 |
| Tutoring services | 86 | 84 |
| Assistance in ordering taped texts | 91 | 100 |
| Note-taking services | 78 | 74 |
| Test/Quiz administration | 91 | 97 |
| Priority pre-registration | 59 | 74 |
| Counseling | 94 | 87 |
| Support groups | 28 | 39 |
| Editing of written work | 53 | 48 |

*Tabled figures are percentages of the number of institutions in that category offering that service.

Table 4

Percentage of Institutions Offering Specialized Courses*

| Type of Course | Small Institutions % | Large Institutions % |
|---|---|---|
| Adaptive physical education | 9 | 45 |
| Human sexuality | 6 | 6 |
| Leadership development | 6 | 6 |
| Orientation | 13 | 6 |
| Career planning | 19 | 6 |
| Assertiveness training | 9 | 6 |
| Other | 6 | 6 |

*Tabled figures represent percentages of institutions in that category offering each service.